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AN OLD MORMON TOWN, NAUVOO, ILLINOIS.

NANCY DUFFY CLARK.

Of all the towns and villages of Illinois, one of the truly historic and certainly the most picturesque, is Nauvoo. It lies just in the bend of the Mississippi, the "Father of Waters." The only approach is across the river in a rickety ferry; or by the perilous "river road," poised half between the sky and water, on the side of a cliff, or by the "prairie road," a drive of forty miles across the plains—the Grand Pre as the Jesuit Fathers first called it.

So, if you haven't been drowned by the venerable ferryman, or plunged off the river road, or suffocated in your long, hot drive over the prairie, you will see Nauvoo, a dream village in the afternoon sunlight rise from the shore, creeping up the hills crowned by rows of vineyards, rising tier by tier to where at the back, the prairie rolls up and away. Nauvoo seems cut off from the rest of the world, for there is no connection by rail. The people have tried again and again to build a trolley. The funds have been raised, the road started, but always some obstacle has blocked the ill-fated project; so that today one sees its ruins—a stone bridge, moss-covered now, across a brook; a grade covered in grass and wild flowers; a bridge which needs only a floor to be complete. The work seems to have ceased abruptly, the workmen dropping their tools where they stood. Indeed the whole town, lying in the embrace of the encircling river, seems to sleep on and on, awaiting the kiss of its Prince Charming, to be awakened to new life and usefulness.

It was in 1840 that the Mormons laid the foundations of Nauvoo, or "Pleasant Land." The houses may be recognized today by the uniformity of their style. They are severely rectangular. There is a door directly in the middle, at either side windows at regular intervals, a second row of windows directly above, and a sloping roof guarded by



A COTTAGE IN NAUVOO.

chimneys at each end—architecture which betrays their New England origin. Their temple was an architectural anomaly; the columns, decorated with a crescent at the base, started out to be Doric, changed suddenly to Ionic, and just as suddenly changed into a nameless order finished by a grotesque sun god surrounded by stars. The temple proper was built on Venetian lines. Imagine all this finished with a Byzantine cupola, and you see the marvelous structure which cost the Mormons more than a million dollars. Yet this temple was destined to be burned. Many wierd stories are whispered around concerning the fire; some say it was burned by the Anti-Mormons; some aver that a faction of the Mormons themselves fired it rather than let the other faction sell it as was their intention. Doric! Ionic! Venetian! Byzantine! It never will be known whether they employed this conglomeration of style through ignorance or through their audacious assumption that they, being the chosen children of God, were entitled to the best of all ages and nations, even to the moon, sun, and stars themselves. This delusion, carried out in practical life, made the Mormons extremely disagreeable in the locality. Did their neighbor have a good horse? It rightfully belonged to the Chosen People, and one of them would speedily become master of it. Had you a barn stored with grain? God willed that His Chosen People should use it at their pleasure. Had you a beautiful daughter? God willed that she, too, should belong to one of His Chosen. This makes it easy to see why the Mormons became so unpopular that the people of Illinois drove them out by means of the Mormon War of 1846, first having shot the leader, Joseph Smith.

Wherever you go in Nauvoo, the villagers display his possessions. "Do you see this table? It was HIS dining table." "Do you see this watch? And the mosaic around the face? It belonged to Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet." After having seen several hundred of his dining tables, and an equal number of favorite rocking chairs, and a car load or so of his personal effects, one concludes that he must have been a man of various and diverse possessions.

And so "God's Chosen People" were driven from their "Pleasant Land." Vacant were the houses, untended the vineyards, while the temple smoked and smouldered; but not

for long. Back in France Etienne Cabet dreamed a dream, a dream of the equality of man. His advance agents came up the Mississippi, and found Nauvoo a ready made city awaiting them. And so the vineyards were tended, the houses were inhabited, and Nauvoo again became the stage for one of Life's dramas—an idyllic pastoral this time, not a tragedy—when the Commune "Icaria" was founded in 1848 by Cabet and his followers. They worked, each one, a certain length of time in the common fields. The results of their labor were hoarded in the common fund. Each received his quota of clothing from the directors chosen annually by vote.

All ate together at one huge table. No one was permitted to put aside possessions for himself, even his favorite books must be given up to the common supply, and old family jewelry must suffer the same fate. One is not surprised to hear that after eleven years, jealousy crept in among the leaders and this commune was destroyed by dissension from within. It has been said "Perhaps no other reform so stirred a continent at its beginning, only to sink without a ripple at the end."

Today the villagers and the unconscious poetry of their lives form a link between the past and the present. Among the ruins of a civilization that is gone, women gossip and crochet, cats sun themselves on cellar doors, while children play "andy-over" in the street much the same, doubtless, as they do the world over. The population is made up of two elements: the German settlers who cultivate vineyards or make wine for a living; and the convent where the Sisters, many of them women of great charm and worldly experience, lead their placid lives just above where the river winds around the convent like a silver band.

There is an unusual hotel—unusual in this sense only, that one is never made to feel welcome. I have been there many times. I have spent the night and I have motored through, stopping for one meal only—but not once have I been made to feel that I am anything but a source of annoyance and an object of suspicion. The surliness of Mine Host is matched only by the caustic remarks of his wife. He makes it plain that he can't be bothered by people, running over the hotel yard, getting in his way. Mine Host's wife



A DESERTED CHURCH, NAUVOO.

meantime keeps a watchful eye on the soap and comb, while she makes pointed remarks about these people who go about in autos; since she does not know them, they can't be respectable; that their starting point is known only to the powers above and their destination is known only to his satanic majesty below; and she concludes by saying that she never cared for autos nohow nor the folks who ride in 'em.

Here is another example of the independence of this unique place. I was the first to step up to the postmaster's window. "You'll have to wait," said he, "Your's is a special delivery and that's always so much trouble." I accepted his ultimatum and stood aside while the whole town filed past. My mail must come last, because it was special delivery.

Early in the 60's a steamboat came down the Mississippi carrying an opera company which stopped at each town. Among this company was a young man of more than ordinary talents. When they reached Nauvoo, he could not go but stayed on for very love of the place. And he is still there, singing bass in the little Catholic choir, leading a frugal life, and working in his cozy old fashioned garden where he may be heard at dusk, singing "The Last Rose of Summer." If you should stop, he will come forward eagerly to greet you, his fine old face alight with pleasure to meet one of his kind. He will show you a portfolio filled with drawings made when he was a boy in Cologne and later when he studied at Dusseldorf—drawings made with a raven's quill, for nothing else was fine enough for his work; etchings of cathedrals of the old world; minute, careful drawings of all the flowers man knows, botanically as well as artistically correct—"My flower garden on paper" as he so quaintly calls it. All these he will show you, turning the pages with eager, trembling hands. That over, he will lean back and tell stories of his young manhood, when he worked as frescoer in Germany. Then he will show you his watch, a marvelous old timepiece, which strikes the hours in a musical tinkle. Or perhaps he will show you his only companion and housemate, a mongrel cur, indescribably dear to his master.

And over and above all hovers the charm of the middle west. The discordant strains of the calliope which float in-

land from a passing steamboat; the expressive phrase of the riverman which accompanies high water, "There's a big water comin' down:" all this breathes the spirit of the Mississippi, beautiful in its very ugliness—and there is one American man of letters who would agree with me.